July 2005. The price thereafter firmed up to reach a high of Rs. 7925 in January 2006. Silver prices were also generally easy during 2003 but gained during 2004. The price was subdued during most of 2005, but showed a firm trend towards the year end, with the price reaching Rs. 12983 per kg in January, 2006. The Movements in prices of gold and silver in India are generally in tandem with similar movements in international markets. The rise in the prices in the recent periods in India largely reflect the rise abroad.

Expansion of banks

1538. SHRIMATI S.G. INDIRA: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government have been urged to expand Public Sector Banks;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether Government are considering to expand Public Sector Banks; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI PAWAN KUMAR BANSAL): (a) to (d) To enable the Public Sector Banks (PSBs) to carry out their functions efficiently and without impediment, Government has announced and autonomy package for the public sector banks on 22.02.2005 which, *inter-alia,* allows them to pursue new lines of business as part of overall business strategy and make suitable acquisitions of companies or businesses, close/merge unviable branches, open overseas offices, set up subsidiaries and exit a line of business, subject to statutory requirements, Government policy prescriptions and regulatory guidelines issued by RBI from time to time.

Introduction of Inheritance Tax

1539. DR. ALLADI P. RAJKUMAR: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to introduce Inheritance Tax in the country;

(b) if so, the details thereof and the reasons therefor; and

(c) whether Government are aware that the Inheritance Tax is unpopular in the countries wherever it has been imposed?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI S.S. PALANIMANICKAM): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise in view of reply to (a) above.

(c) The Government does not have any information in this regard.

Floating of bonds for unearthing black money

1540. SHRI MANOJ BHATTACHARYA: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to issue a fresh series of bonds in order to unearth the black money in the country;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) by when the proposed bonds are likely to be floated in the market?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI S.S. PALANIMANICKAM): (a) No, Sir.

(b) and (c) Do not arise in view of reply to (a) above.

Rationalisation of duty structure on SSIs in Gujarat

1541. SHRI RAJU PARMAR: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that excise duty linked with Maximum Retail Price has affected the Small Scale Industry in Gujarat adversely and the State has asked for rationalization of rates and duty structure;

(b) if so, what is Government's reaction thereto; and

(c) what steps are being taken to protect the Small Scale Industry of Gujarat which is affected adversely by this duty structure?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI S.S. PALANIMANICKAM): (a) Chief Minister of Gujarat made a reference to the Government requesting to consider:—

(i) increase in the level of abatement from retail price from 40% to 50%, for the purpose of levy of excise duty on drugs so as to take care of the small drug manufacturers; and

(ii) reduction of excise duty from 16% to 8%.